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Fall Forest Fire Hazard Season begins Oct. 1

Wildfire Risks Expected to Increase

FRANKFORT, KY (Sept. 29, 2009) - Although significant rainfall marked the first few days of autumn, the Kentucky Division of Forestry is busy preparing for the fall forest fire hazard season. During the season, which officially begins Oct. 1 and ends Dec. 15, it is illegal to burn anything within 150 feet of any woodland or brushland between the daylight hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. The law is intended to prevent forest fires by placing restrictions on outdoor burning during a time of year when the potential for dry conditions and the accumulation of leaf litter increases the risks of wildfire. According to forestry officials, there are additional concerns for the upcoming fire season because of the greatly increased hazards due to the winter ice storm.

"Kentucky's forests have weathered several serious storms this year that have resulted in a significant increase in dead and fallen trees," said Leah MacSwords, director of the Division of Forestry. "The added fuel loads create conditions that are of particular concern to fire suppression efforts including increased fire intensity and difficulty in containment. Our foremost concerns naturally include the safety of our firefighters and communities."

This year, there have been four wildfire-related fatalities in Kentucky. Three of the fatalities resulted from escaped debris fires and the fourth fatality resulted from a wildfire of unknown origin. In addition to the danger of being in the direct path of a wildfire, there are other risks to firefighters and people living in fire-prone areas. These risks include respiratory problems from the choking smoke, poor visibility on roadways and increased traffic hazards.

To reduce the risks of wildfire, forestry officials recommend that citizens be aware of fire hazard seasons, outdoor burning laws, campfire safety and safety precautions to take while burning woody debris. The following guidelines provided by the Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF) summarize the specifics of forest fire season:

\* Fire hazard seasons occur in the fall from Oct. 1 to Dec. 15 and in the spring from Feb. 15 to April 30. During these times, outdoor burning is illegal from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in or within 150 feet of any woodland or brushland.

\* KDF is the state agency responsible for suppressing wildfires and enforcing fire hazard seasons, however, additional outdoor burning laws and restrictions may apply. Therefore, citizens should also

contact the Kentucky Division for Air Quality for air pollution regulations and the local judge-executive's office for possible county burn bans. To report a wildfire, contact the KDF office nearest to your location.

\* Safety precautions should always be taken into consideration when burning woody debris or using campfires. Weather conditions are a contributing factor in the number and intensity of wildfires, therefore outdoor burning should only occur when the wind is calm and humidity is high. Other precautions include keeping brush piles and campfires small and contained, keeping a supply of water and a shovel accessible, and staying with the fire until it is completely extinguished.

\* Forest arson is the primary cause of wildfire in Kentucky. Forest arson is a felony under state law (KRS 149.380) and is punishable by up to five years in prison and/or up to \$10,000 in fines. Suspicious individuals should be reported to KDF, local law enforcement officers or the Kentucky State Police. Citizens may also call the Target Arson Hotline at 1-800-27-ARSON.

For more information about fire hazard seasons, outdoor burning laws and safe burning practices, contact the Kentucky Division of Forestry at 1-800-866-0555 or visit the division's Web site at <http://www.forestry.ky.gov/> <<http://www.forestry.ky.gov/programs/firemanage/>> .